

Perception of Medical Superintendents of Public Hospitals Regarding Factors Affecting Health in Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: The objective of the study was to know the leading responsible factors affecting health in the Punjab province.

METHODS: The universe of the study was all Teaching, District Headquarters (DHQs) and Tehsil Headquarter (THQs) hospitals in the province. The Sample size was taken 30 percent by using stratified-random sampling method. Strata's were made on the basis of the category of hospitals i.e teaching, DHQ and THQ hospitals. Out of total 23 teaching hospitals, 7 (30%), out of 34 DHQs, 10 (30%) and out of 88 THQs, 26 (30%) hospitals were selected randomly by using lottery method. Medical Superintendents/ heads of all selected hospitals were interviewed by using interview schedule.

RESULTS: 29/43 (67.4%) experts considered social factors, 10/43 (23.2%) economic whereas 04/43 (9.3%) experts believed that psychological factors effected health in the province. Major social factors given were unsafe drinking water, wide spread pollution, lack of awareness about hygiene & Infectious or communicable diseases, unhygienic conditions at home & environment, poor sanitation system and life style & behavioral choices. Poverty/ low per capita income, high inflation rate and high prices of medicines have been considered as economic factors whereas depression, anxiety and aggression were enumerated as prevailing psychological factors affecting health by the experts.

CONCLUSION: Social factors were found as leading responsible factors affecting health in the Punjab province. Social factors were further originating economic as well as psychological issues which affect health.

KEYWORDS: Health, Factors, Poverty, Punjab, Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is the sixth largest nation in the world with 207.774 million population calculated in 2017 with the current annual growth rate of 2.4 percent¹. In spite of all efforts by the public and private sectors, Pakistan is not at better position than other developing countries in the region with regard to health and other socio-economic indicators. Health indicators of Pakistan are quite poorer as compared to other developing countries of the region. On Human Development Index (HDI), Pakistan ranked at 146 out of 185 countries whereas India now ranked on 135².

Punjab, being a largest Province, however ranked at top position in HDI out of other provinces regarding health care situation³ but despite the accommodative and compact physical infrastructure of the health institutions, the services portion of the system in the province is not satisfying. The Punjab Health department admitted the fact that:-

"...In spite of extensive network of medical facilities, health condition of the general public of the province as a whole is below the desired level"⁴.

Actually, this statement by the Punjab Health department provoked the researcher to know the reasons that why health state is below the desired level despite extensive network of medical facilities? This initial research study will determine that if the contemporary medical facilities to deal with the biological disorders are sufficient to attain the desired level of the good health in the province or some other factors are responsible and also necessary to be dealt. As, in this day and age, the health experts and researchers have consensus on the fact that health is not merely biological disorder but depends upon multiple determinants including environmental, socio-economic and psycho-social conditions as well as cultural norms and beliefs⁵. The Medical Superintendents being health experts and administrators of the hospitals were considered most beneficial and authentic source to get information for the study.

The key health indicators of the Punjab, given by the Punjab Health department in 2015 were as here under:⁴

TABLE I: HEALTH INDICATORS OF PUNJAB

Health indicators	Values
Infant mortality rate /1000 live births	77
Maternal mortality ratio/100,000 live births	300
Under-five mortality/1000 live births	112
Percentage of Under nutrition (<5 years)	34
Total fertility rate	4.7
Life expectancy at birth	64

Source: Punjab Health Department (2015)

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study was carried out in 2016-17. The universe was all Teaching, District Headquarters (DHQs) and Tehsil Headquarter (THQs) hospitals in the province. The Sample size was taken 30 percent by using stratified-random sampling method. Strata's were made on the basis of the category of hospitals i.e: teaching, DHQ and THQ hospitals. Out of total 23 teaching hospitals, 7 (30%), out of 34 DHQs, 10 (30%) and out of total 88 THQs, 26 (30%) hospitals were selected randomly by using lottery method. Medical Superintendents/ heads of all selected hospitals were interviewed at their offices by using interview schedule. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) has been used for analysis and tabulation of the data while frequency analysis method was used to reach to the objective. The principles of informed consent, ethical approval and voluntary participation of the subject were strictly observed by the researcher in the study.

RESULTS

Table II. Represents that three types of factors i.e. Social, Economic and Psychological were reported as prevailing responsible factors affecting health in the Punjab province by the Medical Superintendents. The results show that social factors are dominant over economic and psychological in affecting health.

Figure I explains that a number of social factors i.e. use of unsafe drinking water, wide spread pollution, lack of awareness about hygiene as well as Infectious or communicable diseases, unhygienic conditions at home & environment and poor sanitation system are responsible for poor health condition. It was learnt that life style also affects one's health significantly. One's behavioral choices like a sedentary lifestyle or excessive and unhealthy diet such as refined carbohydrates, trans fats, or alcoholic beverages affects health badly.

Figure II shows that out of total respondents (23.2%) who believed that economic factors are

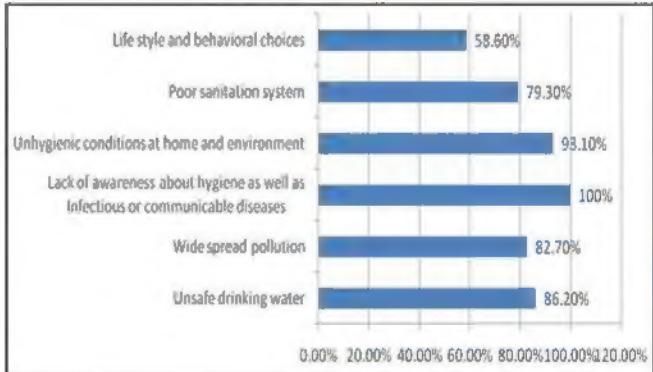
comprehendible, all (100%) were agreed that high rate of poverty or low per capita income is the main causative economic factor behind the situation, 80% considered high inflation rate whereas according to the 90% respondents, increasing medicine prices is the major causative factor for the situation.

Figure III illustrates that out of 4/43 (9.3%) respondents who had opinion that psychological factors are responsible for poor health conditions in the province, all (100.0%) were believed that depression is the major psychological cause affecting health, three fourth (75%) considered the anxiety as main psychological issue whereas 75% of the total respondents thought that aggression is also one of the major psychological factor in this regard.

**TABLE II:
LEADING FACTORS AFFECTING HEALTH (n=43)**

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Social	29	67.4
Economic	10	23.3
Psychological	04	9.3
Total	43	100.0

**FIGURE I: DOMINANT SOCIAL FACTORS
AFFECTING HEALTH (n=29)**



**FIGURE II:
DOMINANT ECONOMIC FACTORS (n=10)**

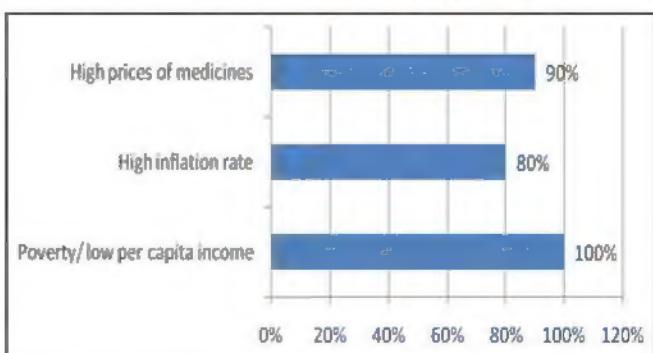
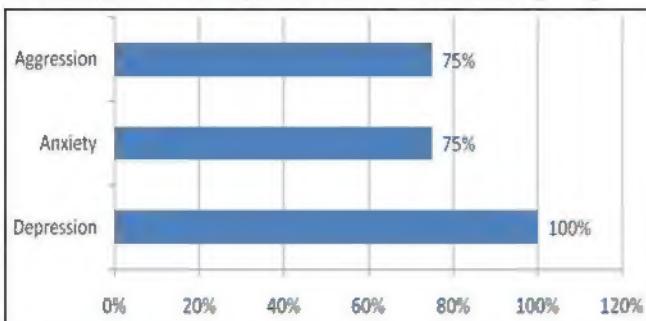


FIGURE III:
DOMINANT PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS (n=4)



DISCUSSION

It is fact that health is not merely biological disorder but depends upon multiple determinants including environmental, socio-economic and psychological conditions. To deal a diseased person is rarely simple and depends upon a number of factors like the nature of illness itself, the kind of person who is ill, the social setting of which he is a part, the psychological condition of the patient as well as; the resources that are available to him / her.

In Pakistan, the researchers agreed that the causes of poor health for millions are rooted in political, psycho-social and economic injustice⁶. The results of the study in hand also confirm that social, psychological and economic factors are major responsible factors for poor health state in the Punjab province. 67.4% experts were of the opinion that social factors have been responsible for poor health conditions in the province. Many previous studies in Pakistan supported the findings with the results that the poverty, low illiteracy & awareness level and other social factors are responsible for the poor health conditions in Pakistan⁶⁻⁸. The Punjab Devolved Social Services Programme (PDSSP) also confirms that many social factors like low level of literacy rate, low status of women, poor sanitary and potable water system are leading responsible factors for poor health situation⁹.

About 23.2% of the respondents believed that economic factors have the key responsibility in poor health conditions in the province. Public Health allocation has remained very low in Pakistan. The ratio was as low as 0.72% of GDP in 2000-01 and just 0.23% and 0.35% in 2010-11 and 2012-13, respectively¹⁰.

Low per capita income, high inflation rate and increasing medicine prices had been considered the major responsible economic factor in this regard. Certainly, poverty plays havoc with the health situation in Pakistan. A study conducted in 2014 indicated that poverty is affecting health of Pakistanis badly as many people go to sleep without taking food almost every

day¹¹. Due to acute poverty, the financial capacity of people is very weak to counteract with the poor situation of health. A survey report of *Pakistan Bureau of Statistics* (2013-14) shows that the health expenditure (out-of-pocket) at national level for the year 2013-14 was Rs. 470 billion in which Punjab has highest share i.e. 54%¹².

A study conducted on the patients in the public hospitals of the Punjab reported that per family daily income of the patients was US \$3 and per capita daily income was less than half a dollar¹³, these conditions haunt many Pakistanis. On the other side, it is fact that medicines have become the most expensive commodity in this country and out of reach of many needy people. In one month only (March, 2016) the multi-national pharmaceutical companies hiked the prices of life saving drugs up by 15 percent¹⁴ while Prices of essential drugs were hikes by 30% in November 2013¹⁵.

A few days ago, the issue was debated in News Papers and on electronic media and then nothing happened and the helpless public is watching the situation helplessly. As a result of this situation people resort to other means of treatment and mostly are hooked by Quakes, the so-called family Hakeems and fake homeopaths practitioners as their treatments are cheaper. This situation worsens the health problems and in many cases when patients reach hospital, the doctor can do nothing.

Economic conditions have direct impacts on mental conditions. A person having nothing to get life saving drugs for his child/ children will have to suffer mentally and psychologically, 9.3% experts were of the opinion that psychological causes are responsible for bad health conditions in the province.

It is pertinent to reflect that the highest number of respondents i.e. 67.4% who considered the social factors as major factor affecting health were of the opinion that the social factors are the fundamental which further cause economic as well as psychological factors. They justified the assumption that causes of poor health for millions are rooted in social issues which, in turn affect the economic capacity and traps communities in poverty. Then the poor economic situation can lead the individuals to the depression, anxiety and other psychological issues.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

The results of the study exposed that Social factors are the leading responsible factors affecting health in the Punjab province. Social factors were further originating economic as well as psychological issues which affect health. Community based health awareness and health education initiatives through professional and trained social workers to lessen the

social issues can improve the health state in the Punjab province.

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